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SEEING WHAT'S NOT THERE: QUESTIONING THE ARMY VISION

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The Chief of the Land Staff (CLS), LGen Mike Jeffery, has released his vision for the future of the Canadian Army. There are two possible explanations for this: the first is that the vision statement serves to set the new agenda for the Army. Vision statements are powerful communicative tools. When designed and expressed correctly they can convey the overarching, driving theme behind an organization's day-to-day activity. Particularly in times of change, vision statements provide the 'forest' for those toiling, head down, in the 'trees'. In that sense, they fulfill not only a descriptive role, but also an aspirational one. Even if a vision is never fully realized, the constant attempts to reach the ideals it sets out create growth in the organization.

However, there is a second explanation for the statement. 'Visions' not only speak to those people within an organization, they also communicate with peers, competitors, and superiors. Perhaps, in light of the proposed defence review, Jeffrey is hoping his Vision fulfils this purpose. In this light, it can be seen as a way of marking territory. It is a way of informing the other Services and the politicians what the Army *should* be all about. This second, more instrumental and political explanation, is supported by other parallel initiatives launched by the Army in recent months. With his testimony in Ottawa and in his 'unmuzzling' of other Army officers, Jeffrey is signaling the start of a campaign to make the Army's voice heard. He is not alone: there has been a spate of 'hats tossed into the ring', all positing visions for the future of one sort or another.[1]

As a part of his quest to have the army take it's rightful place in the 'fabric of the nation', the CLS is striving not only to engender a sense of purpose within Canada's army, but to shape the debate regarding it. This is a valid move, but not without difficulties in the Canadian political and military environment, and therefore displays not an insignificant amount of professional courage. He is setting expectations and they are high. In the end, it is the dynamism of the political environment that will make or break Jeffrey's vision. The key question is therefore whether the Army is 'usable'.

It is possible to reveal some of the devils that the lie hidden in the details of what the vision says, and what it does not. This paper, then, is not an attempt to rewrite the CLS's vision, but rather to 'problematize' it: challenge the assumptions, ask the unasked questions, and look for the implications. It will do so by concentrating on key phrases or passages of the statement and analyzing them in their wider context.

The Statement

The Army will generate, employ, and sustain strategically relevant and tactically decisive medium-weight forces. Using progressive doctrine, realistic training, and leading-edge technologies, the Army will be a knowledge-based and command-centric institution capable of continuous adaptation and task tailoring across the spectrum of conflict. The cohesion and morale of our soldiers will be preserved through sharing a collective covenant of trust and common understanding of explicit and implicit intent. With selfless leadership and coherent management, the Army will achieve unity of effort and resource equilibrium. The Army will synchronize force development to achieve joint integration and combined interoperability with ground forces of the United States, other ABCA countries and selected NATO allies. As a broadly-based representative national institution with a proud heritage, the Army will provide a disciplined force of last resort and contribute to national values and objectives at home and abroad." Chief of the Land Staff Vision for the Canadian Army, 2001.

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Generate, employ, sustain: Raising, Using, and Maintaining Forces for Operations

The Army is a tasked as *the* generator and *a* sustainer of ground forces, but not usually as an employer. In an overseas operational sense, the employer of any force (including land forces) is effectively the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (DCDS), operating through a national contingent commander.[2] The difference is not just one of semantics; the fact that army formations tend to see themselves as force employers leads to a cumbersome relationship for many deployed units. In the mounting phase of an operation, for example, the army is responsible for the training, manning, equipping of the unit and the declaration of its operational readiness. However, the Joint Staff also exert considerable demands on a unit's attention during this period. Similarly, once deployed, although employed by the DCDS, relationships with parent army formations tend to linger on. This overlap (due in no small part to a 'confusion' over who the force employer is or should be) is detrimental to any sense of unity of effort and unity of command. Such 'service territorialism' manifests itself in such things as arguments over the appropriateness of equipment and organization, often causing delays and extra work on a unit already overworked and under considerable time pressures. Is serving two masters counterproductive? Force employment exercised through the DCDS serves several purposes, not the least of which is to provide joint and, more importantly, national guidance. If employment were to be performed from a single service perspective, would the overall effect achieved be reduced?

Strategically relevant, tactically decisive: Nonsense if not linked to policy

At first reading this phrase appears to be straightforward enough, but on further reflection reveals itself as misguided. In the political climate that the Army must operate, it must strive to be *policy*-relevant, often applying tactical and operational forces in pursuit of policy aims. Thinking strategically — or indeed thinking in any purely military sense — will be insufficient.[3] In order to be policy-relevant the Army must be deployable, in both senses of the word:

1. Appropriate to the tasks it is asked to perform (whether these be conventional war-fighting operations, human security missions, disaster relief, continental defence, etc.;
2. Able to be 'lifted'. This is where the term, 'sustainment' from the first paragraph becomes significant. The army forces deployed are not going to lift themselves, nor will they be moved by the army. In that respect, the army will always rely on others for sustainment.

As for the phrase, 'tactically decisive', it is increasingly difficult to see this as being a characteristic of 'general purpose' troops. Again, this is tied to the reality of the kinds of tasks army units will be assigned. Who was tactically decisive in Kosovo? In Afghanistan? In the initial stages of ground operations, the only decisive forces were Special Forces, and their tactically utility is outweighed again by their unique policy relevance. Now, in the aftermath of the initial stages, tactical relevance seems at once difficult to define and beside the point.

Medium-weight forces: The Goldilocks Option — Not too heavy and not too light

If 'strategic' and 'tactical' are the first terms coming to their expiry date, 'medium weight' must be a close runner up. What exactly does this mean in the Canadian context? Where is the line between light and medium? Is it based on vehicle type? Should we be 'medium' across the Army or medium within formations and units? In light of the above discussion on policy relevance, what is medium? Do we need to rethink our ideas of combat power, defining it in terms of effects and capabilities, rather than weight? Canada's army will need to 'punch above' any weight it assigns itself. This will be achieved through a sound understanding of the desired goal.[4]

Progressive doctrine, sound training: How much is enough?

These, too, sound like tall orders, but worthy ones nonetheless. However, they will take time and treasure away from a shrinking pool of resources. Will they be the first sacrifices made in any trade-off with quality-of-life or operational requirements? The creation of a Manoeuvre Training Centre and improved simulation will help with these areas but several questions remain. What kind of doctrine does the Army need: Joint, Army, Alliance, or Coalition? Should it be descriptive or aspirational? In an *ad hoc* world, is the emphasis better placed on examining future concepts? Training right now is capped at unit level and *de facto* focused on operational readiness. Jeffrey aims to change this. What is the realistic level and frequency of training going to be?

Cutting edge technology: Leading edge or bleeding edge?

While technology creates a considerable opportunity for increasing effectiveness while potentially reducing personnel costs and reshaping force structure, it is not a silver bullet.[5] By viewing technological acquisition as a process of 'upgrading', it is easy to lose sight of the qualitative as well as quantitative differences such changes can produce. For example, rather than replacing tanks with new ones (or even new platforms, like attack helicopters or unmanned aerial vehicles) technology might allow the Army to assume different roles and perform new tasks, not just perform its old tasks better or more efficiently.

Technology has another sting in its tail: it can be hard on people. As Jeffrey mentioned to the Senate, he might be able to cut back on numbers if he uses newer technological solutions. This, in and of itself, is neither a good nor a bad thing. However, when new technology leads to an increase in maintenance and other sustainability issues (such as lift) as well as training time, complexity *and* personnel start to be reduced, the net effect might be an increased burden on the remaining soldiers. The merits of the 'labour-saving device' have been trumpeted since the Industrial Revolution, but they have not always been realized. It is imperative that any technological program be balanced with impact it will have on the people meant to implement and 'benefit' from it. Adding more training courses to an infantry battalion's hectic schedule is not an unmitigated blessing.

Knowledge-based, command centric:
Buzzwords or key concepts?

The first question prompted by this phrase is, "What does it mean?" This initial query leads to many more: How is the knowledge acquired, diffused, and applied? What are the strategies for individual and organizational learning? How is experience related to information?

In terms of command, if this is meant to signal army leaders 'stepping up to the plate' and making (traditionally) marginalized issues (such as gender, ethics, and education) the responsibility of leaders at all levels, as opposed to advisors and specialists, then it is a positive and long-overdue development. It must be assumed that command centric does not mean bureaucratic, micro-managed, or deterministic.

Continuous adaptation and task tailoring:
Rolling with the punches

Resisting the urge to again ask what these buzzwords mean, the next question deserving a response is whether this is 'spin' for perpetuating a culture of *ad hocery*. The ability to adapt must be done within an overall framework, comprising not only doctrine, but also an informed understanding of what is possible and what is expected.

With lead times for procurement measured in decades and changes in force structure in years, the notion of continuous change might be misleading. Furthermore, it might even seem disconcerting: images of perpetual chaos and a state of 'permanent whitewater' are a logical extrapolation of this statement.

Collective covenant of trust and common understanding of explicit and implicit intent:
Building a thousand bridges

If a vision is meant to be aspirational then this passage itself holds the key to that promise. If only one piece of the Commander's statement could be achieved, this would have to be it. Were such a degree of trust and mutual understanding currently extant, the remainder of the vision statement would be redundant and irrelevant. However, trust and understanding are fragile and contingent; they are difficult to establish and even more difficult to sustain.

With these ideals serving as desired ends, the means by which every aspect of Army activity is carried out becomes of vital importance. Each prognostication, policy, program, procedure, and performance evaluation must be assessed against its ability to contribute to such a culture of mutual respect and comprehension. There are no shortcuts to building trust: it is only built through consistency and transparency. Common understanding requires a level of reflection and self-appreciation that is rare in one person, let alone nearly 20,000.

Synchronize force development to achieve joint integration:
Cart before the horse

Should single-service force development not be predicated on a desired (and expressed) joint effect? Jointness should be a top-down process, not a 'bottom fed' joining up of service capabilities. If this were to be the case, it will never be sufficiently synchronized to provide the synergy it promises.

Combined interoperability with the ground forces of selected allies:
If you can't beat 'em, join 'em

Increasingly the way in which Army forces find themselves employed necessitates thinking about inter-agency and civil-military interoperability. Only in this way will the Army be seen as policy relevant or strategically effective. 'Militaries-working-with-militaries' is only one aspect of the work the Army will do, and it may be seen as the field in which there is the least amount of growth. CSIS, the RCMP, CIDA, the UN High Commission for Refugees, CARE and countless organizations will make demands of the Army. It would be prudent to be ready to respond.

However, the incomplete nature of Jeffrey's idea of interoperability is not the most interesting aspect of this passage. The intentional reordering of the relevant potential 'interoperables' cannot be overlooked. How does this relate with the political priorities established by the government? Do some options rule out (or at least increase the difficulty of) some others? What kind of possibilities does such a prioritization enable and which does it constrain?

Broadly-based national institution...contributing to national values and objectives:
Give and Take

In some respects the Army has a long way to go to becoming broadly-based. The demographic figures of Canadian society as a whole are not mirrored in the make-up of the Army, especially when examined at each rank level. Women, Aboriginals, and many ethnic groups

are under-represented. Is Jeffrey hoping to correct this 'imbalance'? How? Why? Diversity training and harassment lectures are only a small but necessary first step.

In other respects, the Army is increasing in its similarity to Canadian society. Despite the heroic and persistent myth that militaries are the guardians of virtue in society, resisting the ills that plague the rest of us, the Army reflects national values as much as it contributes to them. In many ways the wider phenomena of individualization, concentration on identity issues, domestic reorganization, and networked social relations are permeating the military, and not just through the recruiting centre. Staunch conservative thinkers within the military may not like the 'Nintendo Generation' but some of its values will make their way into Army life, whether generals and others like it or not. The real question will be how these values are socialized and incorporated, rather than how vehemently they are resisted.

Disciplined force of last resort: On guard for us

No matter how disciplined the Army becomes, it may well end up being force of 'first resort', responding to floods, forest fires, ice storms, or homeland defence. This is the fundamental aspect that seems to be missing from Jeffrey's vision: the role of the Army will be decided by someone other than the Army commander. Relevance means providing the executive branch of the government with an instrument of policy.[6] While military commanders may be asked to contribute to the formulation of this policy (and this is extremely unlikely), at the end of the day they will have to help 'make it happen'.[7] To what extent they are prepared to do so will be the only issue; how much they like doing it will not.

The idea of 'managed readiness' must, therefore, mean being capable of the doing the things you are likely to do, as well as those things you might ultimately do. Basing doctrine, equipment, or force structure on any kind of 'risk assessment' (that is, looking at military threats to Canada and trying to figure out how to prevent or react to them) is unlikely to be the best way ahead.[8] Instead, the Army might be better off thinking about what kind of 'effects' the government will want to achieve, and deciding how (and not if) they can fit into the process of achieving them.[9] This may mean a certain amount of 'double-guessing' and 'reading ahead' but it is only by developing policy-driven scenarios as the basis for doctrinal and force development that the Army can hope to maintain any real policy relevance.[10]

Notes

1. For example, see Bland, D (2002) "Canada and Military Coalitions: Where, How and with Whom?" *Policy Matters* 3.3, for the latest instalment <http://www.irpp.org/pm/archive/pmvol3no3.pdf>, accessed 28 Feb 02.

2. In some cases, component commanders are added, as a means of reducing span of control and increasing service representation. Nonetheless, these component commanders all report through the contingent commander to the DCDS (and not the Service chiefs of staff).

3. A more traditional conceptualization of 'policy' in terms of military applications discussed here might be 'grand strategy'. See Freedman, Lawrence (2001) "Grand Strategy in the Twenty-First Century," *Defence Studies* 1.1: 11-20.

4. In some cases, the capabilities required of the military will be the ones over which they have a partial monopoly: the application and management of violence. However, in other instances the capabilities sought will have more to do with mobility; infrastructure; command, control, and communications; or equipment.

5. See Jeffrey's testimony to SCONDVA for his idea of how the Coyote's increased technical performance could mean that there is a need for less of them and their crews. [Jeffrey, M. (2001) Testimony Before SCONDVA. <http://www.army.forces.ca/LF/sps/scondva_e.htm>, accessed 20 Feb 02.

6. For a more complete discussion of the 'facts of life' see Bland, D., "Everything Military Officers Need to Know About Defence Policy-Making in Canada," in Rudd, D., Hanson, J., and Blitt, J., eds., (2000) *Canadian Strategic Forecast 2000: Advance of Retreat? Canadian Defence in the 21st Century* Toronto: CISS, 15-30. This can be contrasted with not only Jeffrey's vision, but also with his predecessor's. See Canada, Department of National Defence (1998) *Canada's Army: We Stand On Guard For Thee*, especially the section on 'the primacy of operations', pp. 121-122. I am not advocating that the Army should abrogate its combat capability; however, it makes little sense to ignore the kinds of tasks that make up the majority of the Army's workload. *Wishing* warfighting was the number one priority does not make it so in reality.

7. 'Non-domestic' actors may also influence domestic defence policy formulation. See US Amb. Carlucci's February 2002 speech as an example. <http://www.usembassycanada.gov/content/content.asp?section=embconsul&accessed 20 February 2002.
document=cellucci_02140>,

8. In his testimony, Jeffrey stated "today, we have no assigned areas and the threats as I said earlier are unclear...lower readiness is acceptable since the threat is lower."; Jeffrey, 2001.

9. A UK Force Development staff officer expressed his understanding of that country's army vision as "In short, a very usable army." See Applegate, D., "Towards the Future Army" in Bond, B. and Melvin, M., eds. (1998) *The Nature of Conflict: Implications for Force Development*, Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, Occasional Number 36: 77-91.

10. As British LGen Sir Mike Jackson put it, "Political guidance can be really helpful if you can get it." cited in Sheffield, G. and Till, G., eds. (1999), *Challenges of High Command in the Twentieth Century*. Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, Occasional Number 38: 89.

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